

KHRUSHCHEV'S POLITICAL POSITION

- I. The domestic political position of the Khrushchev regime continues to be one of considerable strength. Khrushchev's position is such that he is not obliged constantly to look backward over his shoulder as he makes his moves in the international arena.
 - A. Khrushchev, personally, is at the peak of his authority and holds in his own hands all of the key levers of power.
 - B. Some of his lieutenants, such as Mikoyan, exert considerable influence but group rule or "collective leadership" no longer exists in any real sense.
 - C. Unquestionably, the current Seven-Year Plan occupies enormous importance in Khrushchev's mind. He sees in the goals set out in the Plan and in the establishment of the USSR's world position the guarantee of his place in Soviet history.
 - D. He obviously now thinks of himself more in terms of world statesman than as a mere political operator.
- II. Developments at last week's meeting of the Supreme Soviet illustrate this element.
 - A. For more than a year he has spoken privately about a reduction of the police apparatus. The abolition on 13 January of the central Ministry of Internal Affairs--which, by the way, leaves the secret police (KGB) completely untouched--will be represented in Soviet media as a step toward "withering away of state" and Khrushchev will claim credit for liquidating a further remnant of the Stalin era.

- B. Khrushchev's unquestionably stepping on many toes--considerable disgruntlement among the military is an obvious possibility--but everything indicates that he is powerful enough to bring it off.

III. The demotion of one of Khrushchev's closest lieutenants, announced on the eve of the Supreme Soviet, seems to show that he is in no mood to tolerate unsatisfactory performance from subordinates.

- A. Aleksey Kirichenko, a 52 year old Ukrainian, who until recently was Khrushchev's chief assistant in party affairs, has been assigned to a provincial post.
- B. During the past year there has been a spate of removals at the next lower echelon.
- C. Disagreement with Khrushchev over policy may have figured in Kirichenko's demotion. The timing could mean some link between Kirichenko and the disarmament issue.
- D. However, Kirichenko was a natural target for other ambitious lieutenants who are looking ahead to the succession and thus purely political considerations were probably dominant.

IV. In either case, there are clearer indications of factionalism within the ruling Presidium now than at any time since the big upsets involving Malenkov, Molotov and Zhukov in 1957. While Khrushchev himself seems to be above factions, we can probably look forward to additional shifts among his subordinates as he continues his drive on the domestic and foreign fronts.